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Letter dated 9 December 2009 from the Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I am writing on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania in respect of issues raised in the report issued by the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo as contained in document S/2009/603, addressed to the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) which was re-established pursuant to resolution 1857 (2008). This letter seeks to correct the erroneous conclusion in the report that the illegal shipment of arms to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) was done with the knowledge of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania. The letter also seeks to put on record Tanzania's commitment to the peaceful solution to the conflicts in the region of the Great Lakes and in stopping the armed activities of FDLR in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Tanzania's relations with the Group of Experts

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania reaffirms its support for the work of the Security Council and mechanisms that are in place to support its work, including the work of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United Republic of Tanzania has been working closely and cooperating with the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo since its inception in 2004. Submissions, both oral and written, have always been given to the experts as required. In the past few years, meetings, discussions and communication between the experts and Tanzania's Government officials have taken place in a transparent and expeditious manner. The issues and questions raised were few and straightforward. This time some of the issues raised and questions asked by the experts have been more complex and extensive, hence demanding consultations among more departments of the Government, with the private sector as well as with other foreign Governments. The Government is still in the process of compiling the technical details and preparing the replies and report to be submitted to the experts.

It should be recalled that during the two-year period of Tanzania's membership as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2005 and 2006, Tanzania worked closely and cooperatively with the Group of Experts to address issues of peace and security in the Great Lakes region of Africa, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Burundi. Tanzania tabled resolution 1653 (2006) in the Security Council to enhance the peace processes in the region with a special focus on dealing with foreign armed elements in the eastern Democratic Republic of

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the Congo including the FDLR and the Lord's Resistance Army. These groups have, for years, been seeking to destabilize the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and Uganda while causing immense suffering and death to the civilian population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The activities of FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also been responsible for the internal displacement of populations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and periodic flows of refugees to Tanzania in the past 10 years.

While in the Security Council, Tanzania supported resolutions 1596 (2005), which established travel restrictions and imposed a freeze on the assets of individuals and entities violating the arms embargo; resolution 1649 (2005), which extended the travel and financial restrictions, and resolution 1698 (2006), which renewed the travel embargo. This support was to reaffirm Tanzania's commitment and support to the Council's resolve to end the activities of foreign armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Tanzania as a peace broker in the region

The role of Tanzania as a champion of freedom and justice cannot be overemphasized. It is indelibly etched in its post-independence history. Tanzania as an "island" of peace has a moral obligation to be a peacemaker in the troubled region. That role has been self-evident from the days of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, in facilitating the search for peace in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s for Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi through the Arusha, Lusaka and Pretoria peace processes and recently the Goma peace accords spearheaded by former Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Benjamin William Mkapa of Tanzania.

Tanzania's commitment to peace in the Great Lakes region goes beyond a moral obligation; it is also in its own self-interest. Tanzania, more than any other African country, has hosted refugees from the countries of the Great Lakes region, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, since 1959, before Tanzania became independent in 1961. Hosting refugees who enter a country en masse and in their thousands, as they did into Tanzania, is one of the most generous and expensive undertakings for a developing country like Tanzania. It overtaxes the host country's administrative capacities, destroys the environment and intensifies competition with local populations for the use of natural resources in the refugee-impacted areas. It is a humanitarian act that cannot be quantified in dollars and cents but can only be measured and appreciated by the return of peace to the countries of origin and when the refugees are able to return in safety and dignity. With that level of commitment, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania would not contemplate engaging in destabilizing any neighbouring countries nor condone the transit of arms to FDLR, which is the root cause of the exodus of Congolese refugees to Tanzania and a threat to the security of both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Furthermore, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania believes that the best way to promote peace and stability between and among countries, especially neighbours, is through peaceful political relations, confidence-building and lawful social and economic interactions. Interactions characterized by mutual suspicion and criminal activities such as arms trafficking can only undermine good neighbourliness among States and the wider interests of their people.

It is common knowledge that after years of civil strife and armed conflicts in several countries of the Great Lakes region, the region is awash with small arms and light weapons. Trafficking in arms and light weapons is not unique to the Great Lakes region. It is an international criminal activity, like the trafficking in drugs and human beings in other parts of the world, with which the Security Council is seized and for which it has not yet found an effective solution. Following the unofficial leakage of the report to the media on 23 November 2009, I raised the issue with the coordinator of the Group of Experts and his assistant and they admitted that they did not make a rigorous distinction between Tanzania as a Government and individuals or private entities which are allegedly involved in the illicit trafficking of arms to FDLR. This allegation needs further investigation and verification by the Group of Experts. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania is ready to give its full cooperation in this endeavour. We expect the results of this investigation and verification will be reflected in the next interim report of the Group of Experts.

Tanzania's geopolitical position

Tanzania with its port of Dar es Salaam is the transit country and port of entry and exit of most goods to and from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the other landlocked countries of Burundi, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. In view of its strategic geopolitical location, Tanzania has a special responsibility and contractual obligation to ensure the safe and unfettered transit of all bona fide goods to her neighbours. Some of the transit cargo includes military equipment to those countries. Tanzania has therefore to abide by international regulations on transit trade to the neighbouring States in the region. Military and related consignments are escorted until they are handed over to the authorities of the concerned countries. Tanzania's security organs have strived to intercept and destroy illicit arms, sometimes with the support and cooperation of Interpol and the security organs of neighbouring States. Tanzania is not underestimating this challenge and will continue to curb and combat these illicit activities in a robust manner.

Conclusion

We are ready to work with the Security Council and the Group of Experts in addressing the issues raised in the report. I wish to reiterate the firm commitment of my Government to work and cooperate with and assist the Security Council in discharging its primary responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security including in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa; in this particular case, in seeking a lasting solution to the security problem posed by the armed group FDLR, which is based in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We request that this letter, transmitted on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, be shared with the Chairman of the Security Council Committee on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other members of the Security Council and circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Augustine P. **Mahiga**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations